

## **Appendix 1**

### **Extract from Council Meeting Minutes – 12<sup>th</sup> October 2009**

#### **Motions selected by the Group Leaders**

##### **Motion selected by the Leader of the Labour Group**

###### *Proposals to enhance local democracy*

Councillor John moved the motion in her name which put forward ways to enhance local democracy. Councillor John submitted that there was cross party agreement that the provisions in the Local Government Act 2000 did not work well for non-executive members and the scrutiny function. She felt that if meetings of the Council were televised it would lead to improved behaviour by Members. She felt there should be a right for Members to be able to ask questions at meetings of the Executive and that each ward should have its own forum. The motion made other proposals that she felt could be introduced at minimal cost.

The view was submitted that there existed a democratic deficit and as an example of this it was recounted that the Council had approved its budget in March, only for the Chief Executive to issue a newsletter in May stating that the council would need to save £50M over the next four years. This was noted at the July Council meeting with no other discussion of the issue. However, it was pointed out that the government of the day had changed the law in a deliberate act to abolish the committee style of governance. As for holding meetings at other venues it was pointed out that this had been tried before and resulted in public disturbances. Another view was submitted that proposals such as those put forward needed more detailed discussions which should be undertaken by a small Member-level group.

Councillor Lorber moved an amendment to the motion, accepting a suggestion that reference to 'all party' should read 'all-party/group'. He stated that whilst he understood the frustrations expressed, it was a matter of fact that the legislation invested power in the Executive and this position needed to be accepted. He agreed that improvements could be made but the motion before Council was not the way to achieve these.

A further view expressed support for the ideas put forward by the motion by pointing out that the council already televised marriage ceremonies and it was a logical step to extend this to citizenship ceremonies. Holding meetings at external venues was a positive suggestion and it was felt the current response provided by Lead Members to issues raised at Council meetings was not sufficient. The cost of some of the proposals was raised, such as televising proceedings, both to the Council and to residents who would have to pay a subscription charge. It was not felt likely there would be a high take up. It was submitted that once the committee system was abolished it rendered Council meetings virtually useless. The suggestion to hold meetings in other parts of the borough could be implemented without the need for a Council decision and reference was made to the Children and Families Committee having done this. It was submitted that people were not well informed on how government, including local government worked. Whilst some of the proposals included in the motion were supported in principle others were not and in any case it was felt the whole issue needed further discussion.

The amendment moved by Councillor Lorber was put to the vote and declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED:

This Council notes that membership of political parties and voter turnout in elections is at an all time low; the turnout in the last two general elections being the lowest since 1918.

This Council agrees with Baroness Helena Kennedy, QC that the public perception is that 'political institutions and politicians are failing, untrustworthy and disconnected from the great mass of the British people'.

This Council recognises that much of the public's reduced trust has come about as a result of things such as the MPs' scandal and their disgust at expenses issues such as the claiming of huge Second Home Allowances by MPs who already have homes in London. Nevertheless this Council recognises that this is a problem for local authorities as well as for central government and there are number of ways in which local authorities can enhance democratic renewal and take action both to involve local people more fully and to reduce the democratic deficit.

This Council welcomes ideas from across the political spectrum to enhance local democracy. This Council notes that across the country many local authorities are reviewing the way in which local democracy is debated and the way in which local residents are engaged.

To further enhance local democracy, this Council resolves to set up an all party/group scrutiny task group to investigate how local democracy can be improved, with a view to increasing the debate at Full Council meetings, improving the public's access to local democracy and encouraging more young people to take part.